

Self-Image/Body

Feeling good about yourself

Part of being a teen is having thoughts and feelings about different parts of your life, such as how you feel about:

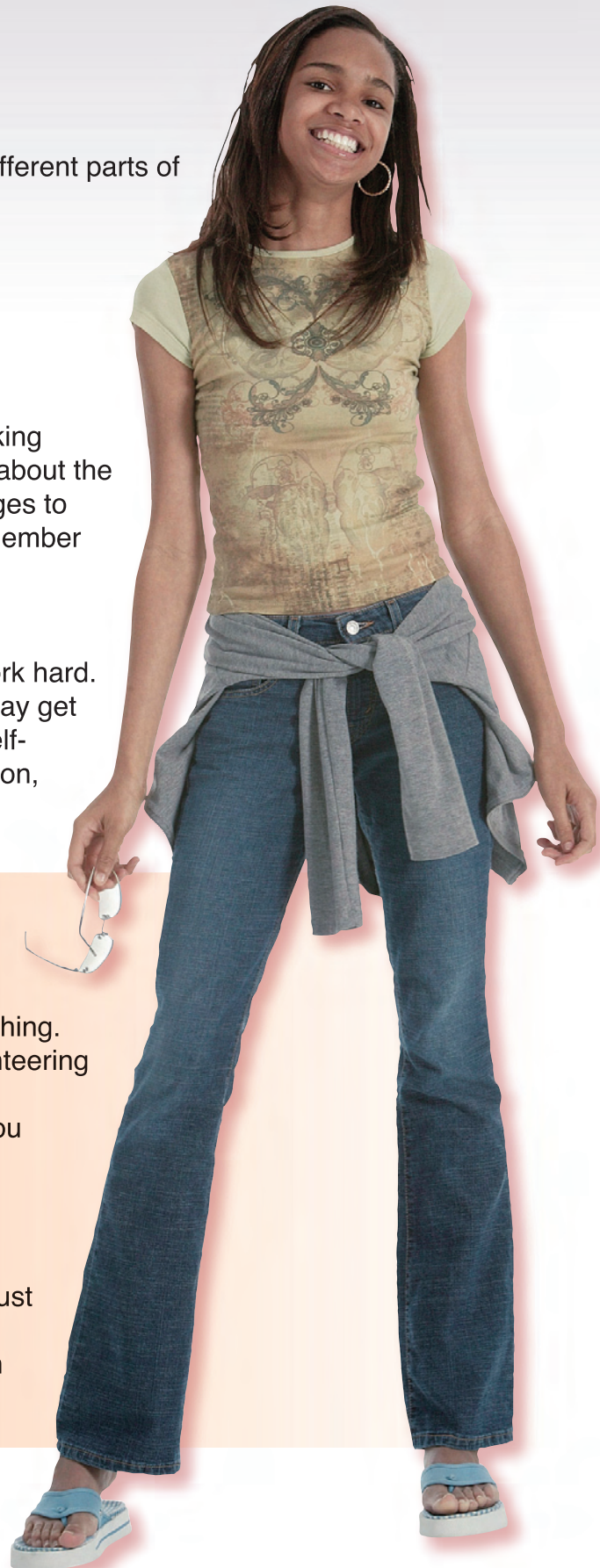
- your friends and other kids your age
- how you are doing in school and in other activities
- your parents
- the way you look

While having these new feelings, many changes are also taking place in your body. It is normal to feel self-conscious or shy about the changes in your body and emotions but there are also changes to celebrate. Even though it might seem tough sometimes, remember that you are absolutely great!

Having a healthy or high self-esteem can help you to think positively, deal better with stress, and boost your drive to work hard. Having low self-esteem can cause you to feel uneasy and may get in the way of doing things you might enjoy. For some, low self-esteem can contribute to serious problems such as depression, drug and alcohol use, and eating disorders.

Try these steps to boost your self-esteem:

- Tell yourself that it is okay not to be the best at everything.
- Help out by doing chores around the house and volunteering in your community.
- Do things that you enjoy, or learn about new things you would like to try.
- Understand that there will be times when you will feel disappointed in yourself and other people. No one is perfect!
- If you are angry, try talking it over with an adult you trust (parents/guardians, relatives or a school counselor).
- Think positively about yourself and the things you can do. Think: "I will try!"



Handling stress

What is stress?

Stress is what you feel when you react to pressure from others or from yourself. Pressure can come from anywhere, including school, work, activities, friends, and family members. You can also feel stress from the pressure of wanting to get good grades or wanting to feel like you belong. Stress comes in many forms and everyone feels stress.

How does my body handle stress?

Your body has a built-in response to handle stress. When something stressful happens, you may experience sweaty palms, dry mouth, or knots in your stomach. This is totally normal and means that your body is working exactly as it should. Other signs of stress include emotional signs such as feeling sad or worried, behavioral (your actions) signs such as not feeling up to doing things, and mental (your mind) signs such as not being able to concentrate or focus.

What causes stress?

Just being a teen can be stressful – there is so much going on and so many changes that are happening all at once!

Some things that might cause stress

- school work
- not feeling good about yourself
- changes in your body or weight
- body shape or size
- problems with friends, boyfriends, or other kids at school
- living in a dangerous neighborhood
- peer pressure from friends to dress or act a certain way, or smoke, drink, or use drugs
- not fitting in or being part of a group
- moving or friends moving away
- separation or divorce of parents
- a family member who is ill
- death of a loved one
- changing schools
- taking on too many activities at once
- not getting along with your parents or having problems at home
- feeling lonely

Handling stress

What are signs that you have too much stress or are stressed out?

Signs that you are stressed out

- Feeling down, edgy, guilty or tired
- Having headaches or stomachaches
- Having trouble sleeping
- Laughing or crying for no reason
- Blaming others for bad things that happen to you
- Wanting to be alone all the time (withdrawal)
- Not being able to see the positive side of a situation
- Not enjoying activities that you used to enjoy
- Feeling resentful of people or things you have to do
- Feeling like you have too many things you have to do

Can stress lead to more serious problems?

Yes! Struggling with major stress and low self-esteem issues can contribute to more serious problems such as eating disorders, hurting yourself, depression, alcohol and drug abuse, and even suicide. Continued depression and thoughts about hurting or killing yourself are signs that it is time to seek help. Talk to an adult you trust right away!

Body image and eating disorders

Have you ever thought that there was something wrong with the way you look? Do you think that you are too short or too tall, too heavy or too skinny?

If you have had thoughts like these, you are not alone. These feelings about how you look are called body image. Body image and self-esteem are tied together since body image can affect how you feel about your whole self. When you put yourself down about how you look, it can lead to negative feelings about yourself in general. Poor self-esteem can also lead to eating disorders that can put your health in danger.



If you start to have negative thoughts about your body and the way you look, think about all of the traits that make you special and unique. Look at your whole self – body and mind – in a positive way and write down what you see. Need a hand getting started?

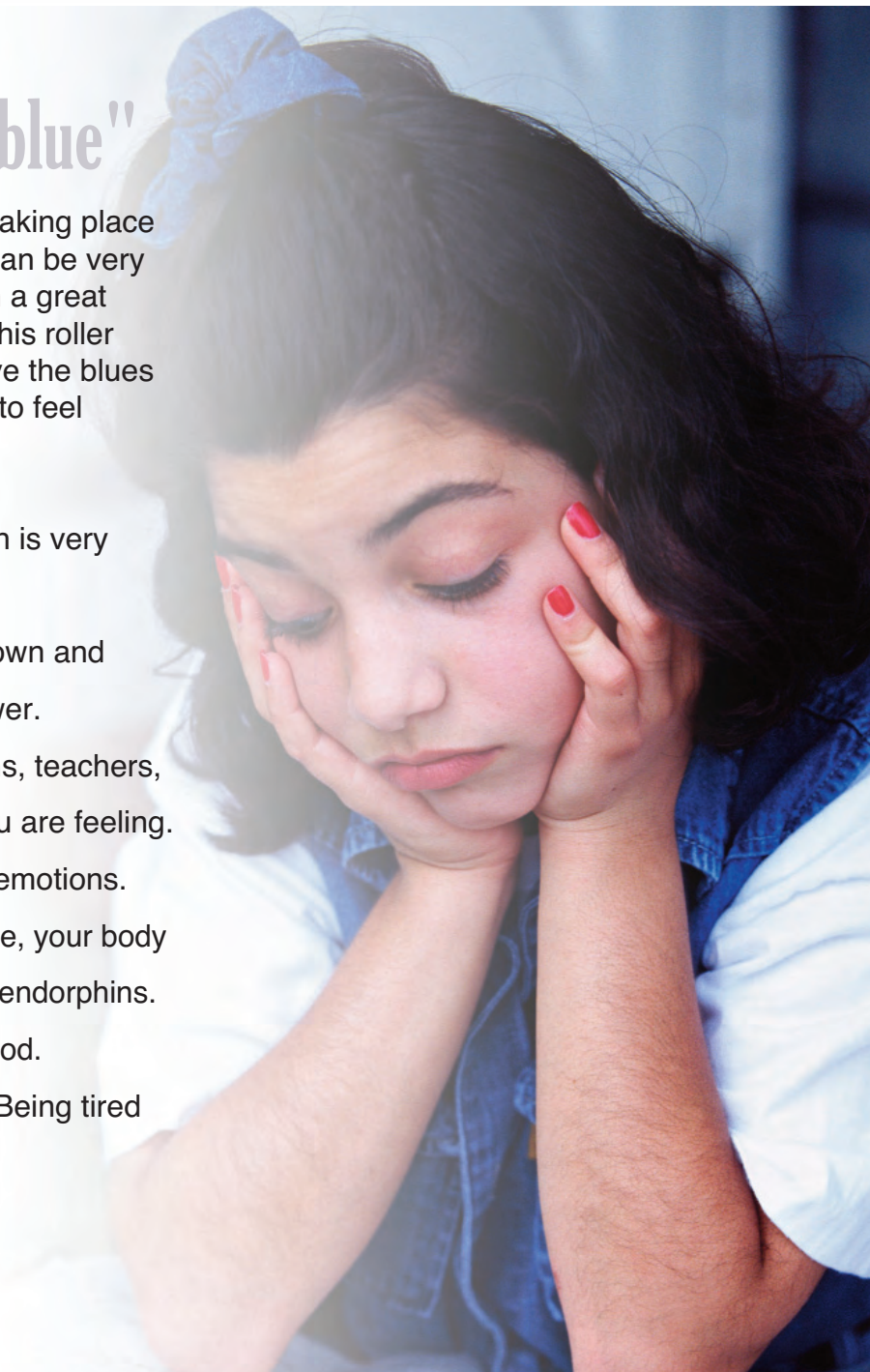
Before you go to bed at night, name three things you did that day that made you happy. By focusing on the positive aspects of your life you can feel more positive about yourself! Don't forget to give yourself compliments too! Say it out loud when the day is done! Like, "Today I played my best in our soccer game," or "My family loved the dessert I made tonight!" or "My friends really liked the jokes I told them."

If you are struggling with an eating disorder or just can't seem to feel better, talk to an adult you trust right away.

Depression or feeling "blue"

As a teenager, there are so many changes taking place in your body and with your emotions that it can be very overwhelming. You might feel like you are in a great mood one minute and a bad one the next. This roller coaster of emotions is normal. It's OK to have the blues sometimes and there are things you can do to feel better. Try these tips to improve your mood:

- Know that what you are going through is very common.
- Find a way to relax, such as sitting down and taking a deep breath or taking a shower.
- Talk to your friends, parents/guardians, teachers, counselors, or doctors about what you are feeling. They can help you sort through your emotions.
- Get some exercise. When you exercise, your body makes more special chemicals called endorphins. Endorphins can help improve your mood.
- Make sure that you get enough rest. Being tired can make you feel more stressed.



There is a big difference between having the blues and having depression. Depression is a serious illness that affects many young people. The good news is that depression can be treated. Make sure to talk to your doctor or school counselor about any worries you have about depression.

How will I know if I have depression?

While some signs of depression can seem a lot like just having the blues, there is a way to know if you need to talk to your doctor about depression. See your doctor about depression if:

you have five or more of the symptoms listed below for at least two weeks, or any one of these symptoms gets in the way of school or family life.



Symptoms of Depression

- Sadness or crying that you can't explain
- Major changes in the way you eat such as not eating or over-eating
- Being crabby, angry, worried or nervous
- Feeling negative or not caring about anything
- Feeling guilty or worthless
- Thinking about death or committing suicide
- Sleep changes, such as sleeping more or having trouble sleeping
- Not being able to focus or make a decision
- Not being able to enjoy the things you usually enjoy
- Not wanting to spend time with your friends
- Feeling restless or tired most of the time

If your doctor decides that you do have depression, there are many ways it can be treated. The important thing is to get help.

Hurting Yourself

What does hurting yourself mean?

Hurting yourself, sometimes called self-injury, is when a person deliberately hurts his or her own body. Some self-injuries can leave scars that won't go away, while others leave marks or bruises that eventually will go away. These are some forms of self-injury:

- cutting yourself (such as using a razor blade, knife or other sharp object to cut the skin)
- punching yourself or other objects
- burning yourself with cigarettes, matches or candles
- pulling out your hair
- poking objects through body openings
- breaking your bones or bruising yourself
- plucking hair for hours

Why do some teens want to hurt themselves?

Many people cut themselves because it gives them a sense of relief. Some people use cutting as a means to cope with any problem. Some teens say that when they hurt themselves, they are trying to stop feeling lonely, angry, or hopeless. Some teens that hurt themselves have low self-esteem, they may feel unloved by their family and friends, and they may have an eating disorder, an alcohol or drug problem, or may have been victims of abuse.

If you are hurting yourself, PLEASE GET HELP — It is possible to overcome the urge to cut. There are other ways to find relief and cope with your emotions. Please talk to your parents, your doctor, or an adult you trust, like a teacher or religious leader.

What are the signs of self-injury?

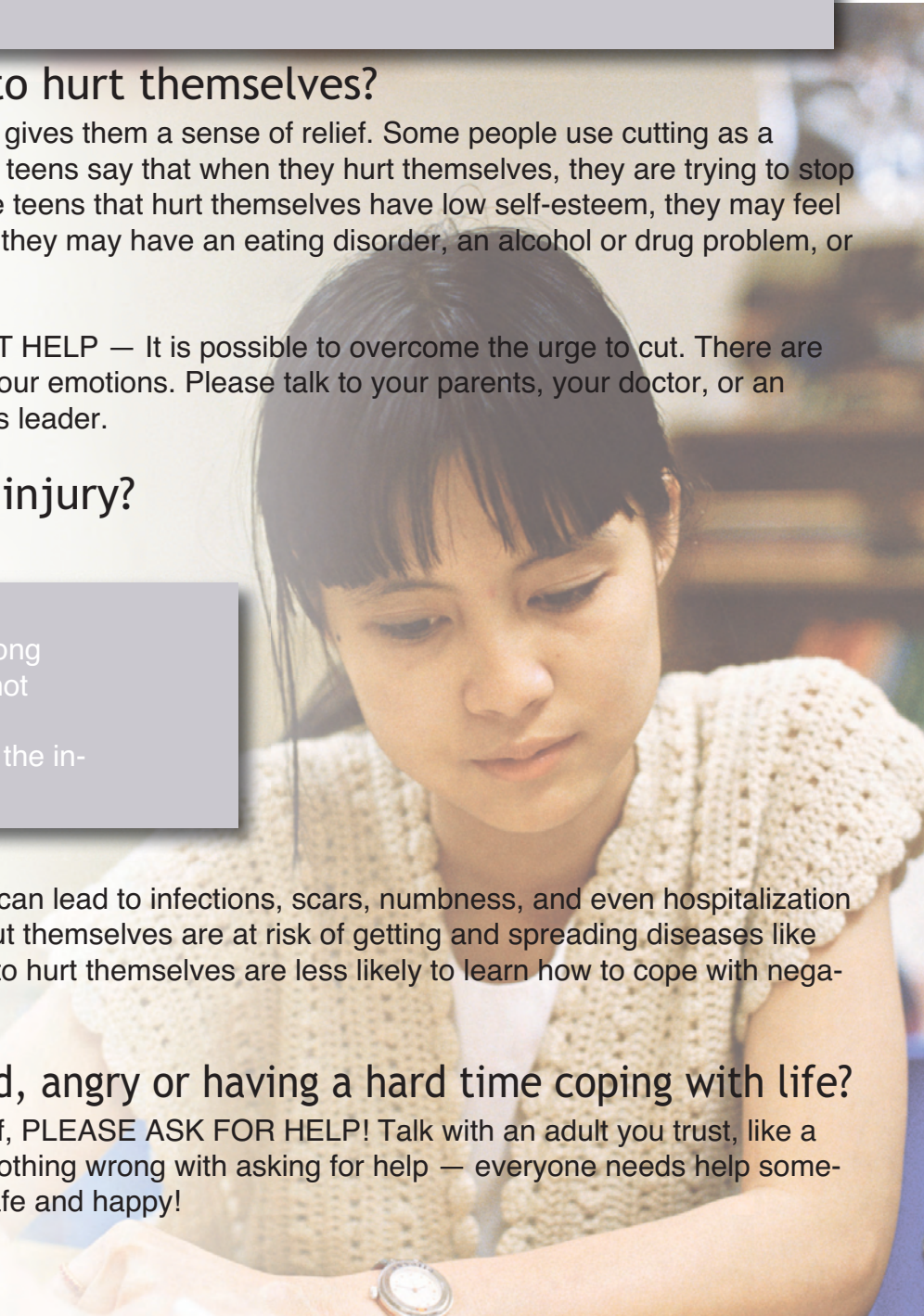
These are some signs of self-injury:

- cuts or scars on the arms or legs
- hiding cuts or scars by wearing long sleeved shirts or pants, even in hot weather
- making poor excuses about how the injuries happened

Self-injury can be dangerous — cutting can lead to infections, scars, numbness, and even hospitalization and death. People who share tools to cut themselves are at risk of getting and spreading diseases like HIV and hepatitis. Teens who continue to hurt themselves are less likely to learn how to cope with negative feelings.

Are you or a friend depressed, angry or having a hard time coping with life?

If you are thinking about hurting yourself, PLEASE ASK FOR HELP! Talk with an adult you trust, like a teacher or minister or doctor. There is nothing wrong with asking for help — everyone needs help sometimes. You have a right to be strong, safe and happy!



Suicide

Why do some teens think about suicide?

Thinking about suicide often goes along with stressful events and feeling sad. Some teens feel so overwhelmed and sad that they think they will never feel better. Some things that can cause these feelings include:

- death of a loved one
- seeing a lot of anger and violence at home
- having parents get divorced
- having a hard time in school, struggling with grades or having problems with other teens
- depression or alcohol or drug problems
- anger or heart-break over a relationship break-up
- feeling like you don't belong, either within the family or with friends
- feeling left out or alone
- Sometimes, teens may feel very sad for no one clear reason.

Every teen feels anxiety and confusion at some point, but it helps to get through tough times by turning to people you trust and love. If you don't think you have people like this in your life, talk to a school counselor, teacher, doctor, or another adult who can help you talk about your feelings. There are ways to help teens deal with these intense feelings and work on feeling better in the future.

How can you help a friend?

If you have a friend or friends who have talked about suicide, take it seriously. The first thing you should do is to tell an adult you trust – right away. You may wonder if your friend(s) will be mad at you, but telling an adult is the right thing to do. This can be someone in your family, a coach, a school nurse, counselor, or a teacher. You can call 911 or the toll-free number of a suicide crisis line. You can't help your friend(s) alone.

What about you?

If you feel suicidal, talk to an adult right away. Call 911 or 1-800-SUICIDE, or check in your phone book for the number of a suicide crisis center. The centers offer experts who can help callers talk through their problems and develop a plan of action. These hotlines can also tell you where to go for more help in person.

Source: The information on this web page was taken directly from the GirlsHealth.gov website which was developed by the United States Department for Health and Human Services.

